

Minutes of the Blue Ribbon Panel for Transportation Funding
Meeting #9
October 2, 2008
8:30 am-10:15 am
Department of Administration – Executive Dining Room

Members Present: Jerome Williams, Dept. of Administration, Co-Chair
Michael P. Lewis, RIDOT, Co-Chair
Lloyd Albert, AAA
Robert Cusack, Preferred Asset Management, LLC
William Sequino, Town Manager, East Greenwich
Keith Stokes, Newport Chamber of Commerce
Peter Osborn, FHWA
Robert Weygand, URI

Staff: Robert Shawver, Diane Badorek, John Megrdochian, Maureen Gurghigian

In Attendance: Phillip Kydd, Michael Abbruzzi, Heidi Cote, Bernard Frezza, Bruce Landis, John-Paul Verducci, Carmela Corte, Meredith Holderbaum, Christopher Long, Arthur Handy, Anthony DeLuca, Henry Schwarzbach, Deborah Rosen, Andrew Harris, Lillian Picchione, Katherine Trapani, Barry Schiller, John Flaherty, and Jerry Elmer.

August 21st and September 4th Meeting Minutes

The minutes for the August 21, 2008 and September 4, 2008 meetings were approved without revision.

Synopsis of Public Outreach Presentations: Michael Lewis, RIDOT and Jerome Williams, DOA

Positive feedback was received from the four public outreach presentations that were conducted around the state. Comments typically supported the work of the BRP and stressed the need for the state to follow through with solutions to the funding crisis. While no definitive solutions to the problem were identified, several new options were suggested, such as surcharge fees for parking, truck weight enforcement, and weight-based vehicle registration fees. It was stressed that the options recommended by the BRP need to be equitable and should address both RIDOT and RIPTA funding. While the people who attended the meetings were very focused on the issue, overall public attendance numbers were disappointing. Additional methods of getting the message out to the public need to be implemented. It was suggested that broadcasting the presentation on TV, either on a network or public-access channel, would be a good method to use to reach more people. A “town hall” type of meeting format broadcast on a RI news network would provide an opportunity to have the event covered and moderated, as well as get participation from citizens/stakeholder groups, policy makers and the business community.

Discussion included the following comments:

Panel members concurred that the public outreach process should be expanded. In addition to using TV broadcasts, it was suggested that fact sheets can be inserted into newspapers in order to raise public awareness about the transportation funding needs and the associated costs. Editorials can also be submitted by members of the BRP discussing various aspects of the issue from the perspective of their areas of expertise. The education process should continue during October so that the recommended funding options can be presented to an “informed” public in November. A revised public communications plan will be developed for the next meeting.

Identification of combinations of funding options that are realistic and equitable will be addressed at the upcoming meeting. All of the options under consideration have down sides and none of them can meet the need individually; removal of tolling from the list places more emphasis on broad-based tax options. A listing of programs and projects that could be funded at various projected levels of revenue generation will be developed for discussion at the next meeting. Information on the amount of revenue that is raised presently through user fees, and how these funds are distributed, will also be provided to the BRP.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for October 16th at 8:30 a.m. The agenda will include discussion on funding options mix recommendations and the public communications plan.